Chocoholic Health Advisory: Take a Hike to Curb Your Cravings!

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Here's the deal. If you cut your snack consumption in half, you won't gain as much weight or have as many obesity-related health issues. No duh, right? Now for the news: A 15-minute stroll down the street or through the park can cut your workday chocolate consumption in half, according to a new study reported by MedlinePlus.

For the study, researchers with the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom invited 78 chocolate snack fiends to enter a simulated work environment. Next, scientists sorted the chocoholics into four study groups to gauge the effects of exercise and stressful work on their snacking habits. To do this, all the participants were asked to stop eating chocolate for two days. Then researchers asked two groups to take a brisk 15-minute walk on a treadmill before they went to their assigned work environments (a bowl of chocolate was placed on participants' desks). Scientists gave one of the groups a low-stress task, and the second group a difficult, stressful job. The other two groups were told to rest instead of exercise before going to their assigned work environments, where they, too, were given low- and high-stress jobs.

Findings showed that the difficulty of the task did not influence how much chocolate the snackers ate. "We often feel that these snacks give us an energy boost, or help us deal with the stress of our jobs, including boredom," said Adrian Taylor, PhD, an Exeter University professor, and lead study researcher.

But snacking on high-calorie food, like chocolate, at work can become a mindless habit and can lead to weight gain over time, Taylor added.

To address this problem, Taylor urged work-time snackers to walk. Findings showed that on average the snackers who walked consumed half the amount of chocolate compared with those who rested—15 grams of the sweet stuff compared with 28 grams. (A 15-gram bar of chocolate is the size of a mini or "fun-sized" chocolate bar.)

Besides walking, another solution for health-conscious snack fiends is to choose healthier snack alternatives such as unsalted almonds.

Want more proof you should start stepping? Click here to read about how city women benefited from what's arguably the easiest, cheapest exercise known to man—that's right, walking!

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